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Mayhen

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Mayhen also known as **Meihem** or **Maehyn** (commonly referred to as ***Mayhe***) is a kingdom located in what the Nordlings often call "Beyond the Seas." However, unlike the southern nations of Hannu, Ofir, and Zangvebar, from which the original meaning of the term was coined, Mayhen shares more similarities with northern territories such as the northeastern duchies of Vespaden and Vinland, as it is situated in the far northwest. The kingdom's only habitable region lies along its fjords, where the moderating effects of the sea create a temperate—though still cold—climate. This relatively mild zone has allowed civilization to develop in an otherwise harsh environment. The majority of the country, however, is dominated by the vast ice sheet known as Ard Ghel (or the *Great Glacier*), which extends across much of the northernmost regions of the Northern Hemisphere.

Due to its geography, Mayhen is [illegible] with its only border being the North Sea. Its

Mayhen

General information

Variation(s)	Mayhe Meihem Maehyn

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nearest neighbors are the island of Tyle and the kingdom of Kovir and Poviss, both accessible by sea after a journey of several days.

Ruler	Meritocratic Monarchy
Societal information	
Official Language	Arendunge
Demonym	Mayhenian
Religion	Mayhenian beliefs

The kingdom's harsh climate has fostered a strict and austere culture, often perceived by other peoples such as Nordlings and Nilfgaardians as less civilized. This perception is partly due to one of Mayhen's most notorious inventions—the lamia, also known as the Mayhenian scourge. The scourge is a spiked and exceptionally cruel whip, outlawed in most civilized nations. Its design allows it to collapse into a small, concealable disk, making it easy to transport and hide.

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Geography

Mayhen is a remote and isolated kingdom located on a peninsula surrounded entirely by the North Sea, which significantly influences its geography and culture. Characterized by a rugged and mountainous terrain, the peninsula is known as mentioned before for its numerous fjords, narrow and deep inlets carved by glacial activity. These fjords create a dramatic landscape that has shaped both the physical and cultural identity of the kingdom.

To the south of the peninsula lie two islands, commonly referred to as the Southern Islands by the inhabitants. The larger of the two islands helps form the only sea in the region, known as the Dusky Sea, which separates these islands from the rest of the Mayhen mainland. The smaller island is connected to the larger one, further emphasizing the geographical distinctiveness of this southern area.

Etymology

The name *Mayhen* is thought to originate from the Arendunge language, where the words *May* and *Hen* combine to mean: *the wounded land*. This etymology reflects the kingdom's distinct and harsh geography, marked by the many fjords that carve into the landscape like scars. According to local legends, these fjords were formed by the icy wrath of the Winter Queen, who cursed the land in an age long past.

History

Origins

The origins of the Mayhenians remain a subject of debate among scholars due to their distinct culture, physical isolation, and unique societal structures compared to other Northern and Far Northern groups. Two primary theories seek to explain their genesis, though both suggest links with the Nordlings, either through shared ancestry or divergent migrations that took place long before their recorded history.

The most widely accepted theory posits that the Mayhenians and Nordlings share a common root, stemming from the various groups of humans who arrived in the Northern Kingdoms during the event known as the First Landing or the Landing of the Exiles. However, unlike other groups who reached the fertile Pontar Delta or the Yaruga mouth, the ancestors of the Mayhenians veered off course during their voyage, landing in the harsh, unforgiving region that would later become Mayhen. The already mentioned geography of Mayhen—dominated by rugged fjords, vast ice sheets, and the imposing Ard Ghel —forced these early settlers into rapid adaptation. The land's brutal climate and scarce resources cultivated a society deeply rooted in survival and discipline. They also probably encountered like Nordlings later on, other human groups, likely isolated tribes, and non-humans in the form of the Aen Ghele elves. The early Mayhenians likely adopted a strategy of conquest and assimilation like their Nordling cousins to some extent, merging different cultural elements, but ultimately evolving into an austere, survivalist culture. This blending of peoples, combined with the extreme environment, gave rise to their emphasis on pragmatism, self-reliance, and a hardened way of life, centered on the

basic need to endure the hostile conditions around them.

An alternative theory suggests that Mayhen itself may have been the original homeland of the Nordlings. This theory aligns with the aggressive and determined nature of both the Nordlings and the Mayhenians. According to this view, the Nordlings were expelled from Mayhen, potentially due to their failure to adapt to its brutal environment. They were considered too "soft" or ill-prepared to thrive in the unforgiving land, which could explain why the First Landing is also referred to as the "Landing of the Exiles." The Nordlings, driven southward, settled in more hospitable regions, while the Mayhenians remained behind, developing the mentioned previously stricter, more survivalist society. This theory also helps explain the disdain Nordlings hold for Mayhenians, whom they view as barbaric and less civilized. The conflicts that arose between the native human populations and non-human races such as the Aen Ghele would likely have been inevitable, reflecting similar tensions seen in later Nordling history when they clashed with non-humans during their own territorial expansions.

The most plausible scenario combines aspects of both theories. It suggests that both the Nordlings and Mayhenians may have originated from a now-lost continent known as Kylfingland, located to the northwest. A series of migrations, or perhaps expulsions, brought these groups to the Old Continent, with the Mayhenians being among the first to arrive and settle in the Far North. While they established their society in the harsh far western northern reaches, other groups moved southward to more temperate climates. These migrations likely occurred in waves over several generations, gradually creating distinct cultural and linguistic differences among the human groups.

Supporting this mixed hypothesis is the linguistic diversity observed among the Nordlings when they arrived in the Northern Kingdoms in the 760s. Rather than sharing a single language, the various Nordling groups spoke different tongues, which eventually merged into a creole language known as Nordlingaen, or Common Tongue. This suggests a prolonged separation between the various human groups before their reunification in the Northern Kingdoms.

Early Years

It is likely that, if any theories linking the Mayhenians with the Nordlings are accurate, the Mayhenians arrived in their territory prior to the 760s. The Mayhenians are believed to have expanded in a manner similar to their potential Nordling cousins, particularly in terms of conquest and assimilation. However, rather than exterminating existing human groups, as was the case in many Nordling conquests, the Mayhenians tended to absorb these populations. Through this process, they formed a unified front, focusing their aggression on non-human adversaries, particularly the Aen Ghele elves, who were native to the region.

Several factors, however, hindered the Mayhenians' early expansion. Chief among these were the unforgiving climate and geography of Mayhen, as mentioned before, characterized by harsh winters, rugged mountains, and vast ice sheets. The difficulty of surviving in such a hostile environment likely slowed population growth and limited the availability of resources, forcing the Mayhenians to adopt a more pragmatic and brutal approach to survival. Additionally, the presence of the Aen Ghele elves, who were far more warlike than the Aen Seidhe elves of the south, posed a significant challenge to Mayhenian expansion. Unlike the

Aen Seidhe, who tended to retreat in the face of human aggression, the Aen Ghele fiercely defended their territories. This resistance likely led to a series of prolonged conflicts between the two peoples, further stalling the Mayhenians' efforts to expand.

Despite these obstacles, some form of accommodation between the Mayhenians and the Aen Ghele must have been reached, as evidenced by the presence of a small Aen Ghele population within Mayhenian society. It is probable that a series of treaties or truces were negotiated, allowing for a degree of peaceful coexistence. These agreements may have included intermarriage, as suggested by the presence of mixed descendants among the human population. This blending of cultures, while limited, would have had lasting effects on Mayhenian society, contributing to a more diverse and complex social structure.

In the early stages of their history, the Mayhenians, much like the Nordlings, likely established a number of small, independent states across the region. These states would have been centered around key settlements, most likely located in areas with access to vital resources such as arable land, water, or trade routes. Over time, these states were drawn into a series of conflicts, both with each other and with external forces such as the aforementioned elves. These conflicts, which may have been driven by competition for resources or territorial control, eventually led to the unification of the region under a single dominant kingdom. This kingdom, which probably had established itself in the most prosperous and strategically advantageous part of Mayhen, gained supremacy due to its greater access to resources and manpower.

The precise details of this unification process remain unclear, as much of what is known about this period comes from oral traditions rather than written records. The sagas and epic poems passed down through generations offer a highly romanticized and embellished version of events, often focusing on heroic deeds, legendary battles, and the deeds of mythical ancestors. While these stories provide valuable insights into the values and beliefs of early Mayhenian society, they are not reliable sources of historical fact. Modern scholars have attempted to piece together a more accurate picture of this era by analyzing these oral traditions in conjunction with archaeological evidence. However, much of the early history of Mayhen remains shrouded in mystery.

It was not until the 910s, when the Mayhenians first came into contact with the Nordling-founded kingdoms to the south, that written records began to be kept. These records, primarily in the form of trade agreements, diplomatic correspondence, and legal codes, provide the first clear evidence of a structured Mayhenian society close to that of modern day Mayhen. By this time, the Mayhenians had developed a highly organized political and military system, which allowed them to interact with their more developed southern neighbors on relatively equal terms.

10th - 12th century

Referred to as the Centuries of Renewal or the Era of Misfortunes, the 10th and 12th centuries in Mayhen were marked by the decline of prominent families due to a series of disruptive events, including assassinations, uprisings, and wars, among other significant occurrences. These developments, compounded by the kingdom’s geographic and climatic conditions, culminated in its unification under a singular state entity. This period also witnessed the formal

establishment of the meritocratic monarchy, a defining feature of Mayhen's governance system.

13th century

The 13th century, often referred to as the *Golden Age of Mayhen*, represents a period of remarkable territorial expansion and increased political autonomy for the Mayhen kingdom. During this era, Mayhenese warriors successfully asserted control over several territories that had previously been under the dominion of the Skelligers, including Hen Inis, Aenye Ard, Loc Gwen, and Tir Lughain, among others. Many of these territories were designated as protectorates, required to pay tribute to Mayhen primarily in the form of resources or, in some cases, slaves. While most protectorates maintained a degree of local governance, smaller and less populous islands underwent a process of Mayhenization, involving cultural assimilation, economic integration, and political restructuring to align them more closely with the kingdom's system and way of life.

This territorial expansion allowed Mayhen to establish a modest maritime empire, significantly enhancing its influence across the Great Sea. The establishment of a maritime empire lessened the kingdom's isolation, facilitating cultural and economic exchanges with regions beyond the Northern Kingdoms and Nilfgaard, and introducing new ideas and practices to Mayhen. These interactions contributed to the kingdom's internal development and strengthened its position in the region and even beyond.

The period of expansion and protectorate governance endured until the mid to late 14th century, at which point these island territories achieved independence through conflict, notably during the so-called *Small Wars* (1350s–1360s). These wars weakened Mayhen's ability to maintain control over its protectorates, as the kingdom faced multiple rebellions and struggled to allocate resources effectively. Additionally, the *Great Winter Crisis of the 1360s–1370s* further destabilized the kingdom by exacerbating food shortages and causing internal discontent within Mayhen. This combination of military strain and economic hardship created a power vacuum that allowed the islands territories to sever ties with Mayhen. Later, the Skellige Islands also relinquished their hold over these territories due to the fierce resistance of their inhabitants, who successfully repelled the Skelliger raiders, after being dominated by a foreign power for more than a century.

14th century and beyond

Around the period between 1360s - 1370s, due to a mixture of factors (climate change and the uncontrolled Source that was the then queen of the kingdom) refugees from Mayhen arrived to Kovir fleeing an extremely harsh winter (more than they were used to). In Kovir, they would stay for about ten years, until the problem with the Source was solved. Most of these refugees would eventually return to their homeland. However, some decided to stay in Kovir, with the majority of those who decided to stay, settling in Lan Exeter because, to some extent, the city's canals that replaced the streets reminded them of the fjords of their homeland.

Culture

Mayhenian culture is deeply shaped by the kingdom's geographic isolation, harsh environment,

and austere way of life. The long, bitter winters, coupled with the kingdom's location on the edges of the known world (until the 14th century and the discovery of the Western Continent by Fabio Sachs), have fostered a strong sense of community, self-reliance, and resilience. In Mayhen, every individual is expected to contribute to the survival and well-being of their community, a necessity born from the scarcity of resources. This collective ethos has bred a culture that values independence, hard work, and stoicism. It is a society where frivolity is discouraged, and individuals are judged by their capacity for endurance and their ability to withstand the often unforgiving natural conditions.

As trade opened with other regions like Kovir, Poviss, and even Nilfgaard, Mayhen has absorbed some cultural influences, particularly in the coastal settlements. However, these influences are often adapted to fit the more practical and austere Mayhenian worldview.

Arts and Aesthetics

In a society where survival is the priority, the arts take a practical and often understated form. Mayhenian craftsmanship is characterized by simplicity, durability, and functionality. Weapons, tools, and ships are built for efficiency rather than decoration, though there is a minimalist aesthetic to their design that reflects the stark beauty of their environment. Woodcarving is a common art form, with intricate designs often etched into the prows of ships, home interiors, and ceremonial objects.

Mayhenians also have a rich tradition of storytelling, which serves as both entertainment during the long winters and a means of preserving their history. Epic poems and sagas recounting the deeds of legendary ancestors, as well as battles against nature and rival human and non-human forces, are passed down orally from one generation to the next. This oral tradition is essential in maintaining Mayhenian identity, especially in a kingdom where literacy rates are lower compared to the Northern Kingdoms due to the isolated and rural nature of most its settlements.

Music in Mayhen tends to be somber and haunting, with deep, resonant tones that echo the sound of the wind and the sea. Stringed instruments made from local wood and animal sinew are common.

Physical Competitions

In addition to storytelling, physical activities play an essential role in Mayhenian recreation, particularly during the brief summers when the climate permits outdoor events. Competitions often revolve around their environment, such as boat races through the fjords or reindeer races across snow-covered landscapes. These events, typically held at the end of the long winters or the beginning of the short summer, bring the Mayhenians from different places together, celebrating both physical prowess and survival against the odds.

Fighting Tournaments

Fighting tournaments are a prominent form of entertainment in Mayhen, though they differ significantly from the more spontaneous, street-based brawls found in places like Novigrad or Beauclair. In Mayhen, these tournaments are highly organized, with designated arenas for

combat. Participants, often warriors trained in Mayhen's austere and demanding environment, compete not only for glory but to demonstrate their fitness and endurance, traits highly valued in the society.

Theater and Performance

While theater exists in Mayhen, it is less complex and less popular than in the more cosmopolitan Northern Kingdoms. Plays are generally of the epic or melodramatic genres, often derived from the oral sagas that are a cornerstone of Mayhenian culture. These performances, primarily staged in coastal settlements like the capital, Arendye, reflect the community's preference for practicality over artistic flourish. In recent years, the more exposure to Nordling and Nilfgaardian cultures has introduced opera to Mayhen. However, in typical Mayhenian fashion, the art form has been adapted to suit local tastes, becoming more folkloric and less extravagant.

Outdoor Sports

Given the challenging environment, outdoor sports hold a significant place in Mayhenian culture. When the weather allows, activities such as hiking, swimming, parkour and running dominate the recreational landscape.

Social Structure

The social structure in Mayhen is relatively egalitarian, especially in comparison to other northern and southern countries. Mayhenian society has historically had little tolerance for rigid class hierarchies or feudalism, given that survival in such a hostile environment requires cooperation from all members of society. While there are wealthier and more powerful families, these distinctions tend to carry less weight than in other societies. Leadership is often earned through deeds rather than birthright, and those who lead must demonstrate practical knowledge and strength, as a result, dynasties have been rare or short-lived. This has led to the rise of a meritocratic warrior class that holds both political and military power in Mayhenian society.

Women in Mayhen hold nearly equal status to men, a distinction that sets them apart from some of regions such as the Northern Kingdoms, where the situation of women's role in society varies throughout the realms, with several successful warrioresses, priestesses or sorceresses, but also as well many cases when a young maiden is forced by the family to marry an unwanted person. Gender equality in Mayhenian society stems from the necessity of every individual contributing to the survival of the community, whether through farming, fishing, hunting, or defending the territory. Women can hold positions of leadership, engage in battle, and participate in raids, often fighting alongside men. This has given rise to a culture where physical and mental fortitude, rather than gender, determines one's role and standing.

Government

Mayhen operates under a unique form of monarchy known as a meritocratic monarchy, blending elements of both traditional monarchy and merit-based leadership. Unlike the elective monarchy found in the Skellige Isles, where only influential clans may participate in the election process, Mayhen opens leadership opportunities to all families. This creates a broader and more

inclusive form of succession.

The candidates for the throne in Mayhen do not undergo a formal voting process like in Skellige. Instead, they are required to participate in a rigorous series of challenges called *Prøvelsene av Lederskap* (literally translated as "*The Trials of Leadership*"). These trials test various qualities essential to effective rule, such as leadership, strategy, physical prowess, and wisdom. Any family, regardless of its social standing (with the exception of slaves), is allowed to present a candidate for these trials, making Mayhen's system far more accessible than many traditional monarchies.

The trials are held at intervals of 10 to 15 years, though the exact timing depends on the perceived success of the current monarch's reign. If the reign has been prosperous and the monarch's heir is deemed capable, the trials may be delayed. However, should the monarch falter, or if their potential successor is found lacking, the trials are held sooner, resetting the dynastic cycle. This system results in the previously mentioned relatively short dynasties, as Mayhenian rulers rarely last more than three or four generations before another round of trials is called.

Law and Justice

Mayhenian law is strict and often brutal, reflecting the harsh realities of life in the kingdom. The legal system is based on a combination of community justice and traditional codes of honor, where disputes are often settled through arbitration by local leaders or, in more serious cases, through trials by combat. Exile is a common punishment for severe crimes, as the loss of communal support is often seen as a death sentence in such a harsh land.

The use of the *lamia*, or Mayhenian scourge, is one of the most infamous aspects of their justice system. Though it is considered barbaric in other countries, the scourge is a practical tool in a society that places great value on discipline and maintaining order. Its use is often reserved for severe crimes such as theft, treason, or failure to contribute to the community's survival, and while its use has diminished in recent decades, it remains a symbol of the kingdom's rigid approach to law and order.

Slavery

Slavery in Mayhen is a deeply ingrained, yet practical institution that reflects the kingdom's harsh environment and resource scarcity. Unlike the more extensive and economically driven systems of slavery seen in places such as Nilfgaard, Kilan-Tal or Zerzura, slavery in Mayhen serves a dual purpose: punishment for crimes and a means of acquiring labor for particularly dangerous or undesirable tasks. In the unforgiving landscape of Mayhen, where survival requires the cooperation of all members of society, slaves fill a crucial, though grim, role.

Origins and Justification

The practice of slavery in Mayhen has its roots in the kingdom's isolation and the need to maximize the efforts of every able-bodied person for survival. In a society where the majority of resources come from the sea or the harsh, icy lands, the need for labor, particularly for dangerous tasks such as mining in the frozen interior or fishing in treacherous waters, became

paramount. Rather than risking the lives of their own citizens, the Mayhenians turned to enslaving outsiders (particularly captured raiders) and their criminals.

Slavery is justified in Mayhenian culture primarily through practicality rather than ideology. The harsh environment does not afford the luxury of lenient justice or idle punishment, and slavery is often viewed as a more humane alternative to execution or exile. For a convicted criminal or captured enemy, becoming a slave is seen as an opportunity to contribute to society, albeit under duress, rather than being outright discarded. The practical need for labor in maintaining the kingdom's few economic resources—fishing, sea mammals hunting, and both ice and mineral mining—ensures that slavery continues as a necessary, if brutal, institution.

Enslavement as Punishment

One of the most common sources of slaves in Mayhen comes from within the kingdom itself, through punishment for serious crimes. Individuals who commit theft, treason, or fail to fulfill their communal obligations may be sentenced to slavery as an alternative to execution or exile. Slavery as punishment is typically indefinite, though in some cases, an individual might earn their freedom through exemplary service or by performing an exceptional deed that benefits the community. However, this is rare, and most slaves remain bound to their status for life.

Slaves are not seen as being entirely outside of society but occupy the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Their labor is usually directed toward the most dangerous and grueling tasks, such as venturing into the frozen interior to mine ice or precious minerals, or working the cold, hazardous waters to gather marine resources. The dangerous nature of these jobs means that the mortality rate among slaves is high, but their value to Mayhenian society lies in their expendability.

Acquisition of Slaves

In addition to domestic criminals, a significant number of slaves in Mayhen come from raids and warfare. Raids on other regions, particularly the islands of Skellige or the coastal villages of Kovir and Poviss, often result in the capture of prisoners, who are then brought back to Mayhen as slaves. These captives, taken during periods of resource scarcity, are viewed as a valuable source of labor, especially during the long winters when food and supplies are limited.

Skelligers are among the most common enslaved group, as the rivalry between Mayhen and the Skellige Isles is fierce. Skelligers captured during raids are prized for their physical strength and resilience, qualities that make them well-suited for the backbreaking labor required in Mayhenian society. In rarer instances, other foreign captives, taken during raids on merchant vessels from distant lands, also find themselves enslaved in Mayhen, though they are less common due to the kingdom's remote location.

Trade in slaves is not a widespread practice in Mayhen. Unlike in some other countries, where slaves are bought and sold in markets, Mayhenians typically acquire slaves directly through the already mentioned raids, with the process seen as part of their maritime and warrior culture. Occasionally, slaves may be traded (specially with Nilfgaardians and Skelligers) but this is infrequent, as most are kept for domestic use.

Roles and Conditions of Slaves

The lives of slaves in Mayhen are harsh, as they are assigned to the most dangerous and undesirable tasks within the kingdom. The most common roles for slaves include working in the freezing mines of the interior, harvesting ice from the glacier, and fishing in the turbulent, icy waters of the North Sea. These jobs are physically exhausting and fraught with peril, with many slaves succumbing to injury, exposure, or exhaustion.

While the law of Mayhen forbids the outright torture of slaves, their treatment is generally harsh and unforgiving. The practical nature of Mayhenian society does not afford luxuries for slaves, and they are given only the bare minimum in terms of food, clothing, and shelter to ensure they can perform their duties. The use of the *lamia*, or Mayhenian scourge, is a common form of punishment and control. Slaves who are seen as rebellious, lazy, or disobedient may be flogged with the scourge, that was partially designed to inflict maximum pain and leave lasting scars. While the lamia is infamous for its cruelty, its use is seen as a necessary measure to maintain order and discipline among the slave population.

Social Perception of Slaves

In Mayhenian society, slaves occupy a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they are seen as valuable resources, essential for the kingdom's survival. On the other hand, they are regarded with a mixture of disdain and pity, as their low status and brutal lives set them apart from free Mayhenians. However, unlike in more hierarchical societies, where slaves are treated as subhuman, Mayhenians view slavery as a practical, though unfortunate, necessity. The harsh realities of their environment mean that there is little room for sentimentality, and slaves are expected to contribute to the survival of the kingdom, just as any free citizen would.

Slaves are not typically allowed to marry free citizens, though they may form relationships with other slaves. Children born to slaves generally inherit the status of their parents, though there are cases where a slave child, particularly one with exceptional skills, may be adopted into a free family or granted freedom by their master. However, such instances are rare, and the majority of slaves remain part of a generational underclass.

Despite the hardship of their lives, slaves are seen as a necessary part of Mayhenian society. They perform the tasks that free citizens are unwilling or unable to do, and their contributions are essential to the kingdom's continued survival in its harsh, unforgiving environment.

Maritime Culture

As an isolated kingdom, Mayhen's proximity to the North Sea has heavily influenced its culture, with the already mentioned fjords providing the only habitable land. The kingdom's maritime traditions are essential to its survival, and its people are skilled sailors, fishermen, and shipbuilders. The sea provides food and the means to trade with neighboring kingdoms, and despite its dangers, it is a lifeline for the Mayhenians.

Their longboats, designed for speed and maneuverability, are similar to those of the Skelligers but often smaller and sturdier, built to withstand harsher waters and the icy conditions of the far northwest. The Mayhenians are known for their seamanship, and much of their culture

revolves around the sea, from seasonal fishing expeditions to trade and raiding missions.

While raiding is not as common or central to their economy as it is for the Skelligers, Mayhenians do engage in occasional plundering expeditions, particularly when resources are scarce. These raids tend to be violent and brutal, as the Mayhenians, constrained by their limited resources, often target settlements that are difficult to reach, ensuring their attacks are decisive and final.

Religion and Spirituality

Mayhenian religious practices are deeply tied to the natural world, reflecting both reverence and fear for the harsh environment in which they live. Rather than following organized, structured religions like those found in other countries such as the Nilfgaardian Empire, Mayhenians adhere to an animistic belief system that venerates the land, sea, and ice as powerful forces that shape their lives. Their spirituality is pragmatic and deeply rooted in survival, with rituals and traditions designed to honor these natural forces and seek protection from their wrath.

The Mayhenians believe that everything in nature is imbued with a spirit or life force. The sea, the glaciers, the winds, and even the fjords are all seen as conscious entities capable of both aiding and punishing humanity. Fishermen offer small tokens or prayers to the spirits of the sea before embarking on long voyages, hoping for calm waters and a bountiful catch. Hunters might leave offerings of food at sacred sites before venturing inland, asking for safe passage through the unforgiving wilderness.

The sea, in particular, is revered as both a life-giving and treacherous force. Mayhenian rituals often revolve around its unpredictable nature, acknowledging that while the sea provides sustenance, it can just as easily take lives through storms or accidents. Rituals for safe travel or protection during storms are common, and sacrifices of food, crafted items, or even animals are made at the shores.

Despite their reverence for nature, Mayhenians tend to be practical in their spiritual beliefs, blending superstition with everyday survival. Most rituals and customs serve dual purposes: to honor the spirits and to ensure practical benefits like a successful hunt, a calm sea, or a bountiful harvest. While they may perform rites or offer sacrifices, Mayhenians are aware that these actions are not guarantees but simply a way to show respect to forces they cannot fully control.

Ard Ghel

The *Ard Ghel*, or the Great Glacier, holds a central place in Mayhenian spirituality. It is viewed as an ancient and sacred realm where powerful spirits dwell, representing the merciless cold and the unknown that stretches beyond human settlements. The glacier is considered a living entity, one that moves and shifts slowly over centuries, shaping the land and testing the strength of those who venture near it. For the Mayhenians, it is both a source of spiritual power and a reminder of their fragility in the face of nature's might.

Travelers venturing into the glacier's icy interior often perform solemn rituals beforehand,

making offerings to the spirits of the glacier in hopes of protection. These offerings range from food and tools to crafted amulets, all intended to placate the spirits and secure safe passage. Those who defy the glacier's power without proper respect are believed to be cursed, doomed to disappear into its depths without a trace.

The Winter Queen and Aen Ghele Influence

The Mayhenians have also incorporated some elements of the Aen Ghele elves' beliefs, particularly the figure of the Winter Queen. While the Aen Ghele revere her as a goddess, the Mayhenians view her as a powerful spirit who embodies the deadly, icy winters that shape their lives. According to Mayhenian belief, the Winter Queen's wrath manifests in particularly brutal winters, blizzards, or unexplained deaths during the cold season. Offerings of food, firewood, and carved effigies are made to honor her and ask for her mercy during winter months.

The Nordling Influence

Some Mayhenians have integrated the *Curse of the Black Sun* into their own spiritual framework, influenced by tales of Nordling traders. Instead of believing in the classical idea of "*sixty girls born under the Black Sun possessed by demons*," Mayhenians interpret the curse as a sign of the Winter Queen's Final Wrath. They believe these women are embodiments of her fury, destined to bring about an apocalyptic freeze that will cover the world in ice. This has led to some fear and superstition surrounding girls born under celestial events, specially lunar eclipses.

Traditions and Customs

Mayhen is home to several unique traditions, many of which revolve around survival in the kingdom's harsh environment. One of the most well-known customs is the *debt of life,* a practice that spread to the Northern Kingdoms through the kingdom of Kovir. The debt of life dictates that if someone saves another's life, the rescued individual is bound by an obligation to repay the favor, either by serving the savior for life, until the savior releases them from the debt, or until they save the other from a similarly life-threatening situation. This tradition has become a foundational element of Mayhenian justice and honor, with a strong adherence in the Northern Kingdoms among the dwarves of Mahakam, although less so among the more cosmopolitan borgese dwarves.

Other notable customs in Mayhen include the use of specially treated urine to wash hair, a practice believed to enhance cleanliness and health. Another tradition involves the consumption of braedvin, during the first sunny day of the year. The Mayhenians gather outdoors to enjoy this drink, marking the end of the long, dark winter months.

Superstition also plays a significant role in Mayhenian culture. For instance, the common practice of knocking on wood to avoid tempting fate is taken further in Mayhen, where locals also recite the numbers 7, 9, and 13 aloud. These numbers are believed to possess special protective powers, and speaking them is thought to provide additional defense against misfortune.

Regarding naming, the Mayhenians employ a distinct system of three surnames, which stands in contrast to the simpler naming customs of the Skelligers, while bearing some similarities to

the more complex naming traditions of noble families in the Northern Kingdoms. This system reflects both the heritage and familial ties of the individual, emphasizing the importance of both parental lineages.

The first surname in the Mayhenian tradition typically denotes the family's origin or historical function within society. This might reflect the occupation or social role the family once held, such as a craft, profession, or a notable deed for which the family became known. Over time, this first surname often serves as a marker of the family's ancestral roots and is passed down through generations, maintaining a connection to the family's origins.

The second and third surnames are selected from the father's or the mother's family names, offering flexibility based on family circumstances. In contrast to strictly patrilineal or matrilineal naming traditions, Mayhenians prioritize individual choice, allowing families to decide the order of these surnames. This decision can be influenced by various factors, including respect for the mother's family, the prominence of a particular familial line, or significant events surrounding the birth. For example, in cases of particularly difficult or dangerous childbirths, it is common for the mother's surname to be placed first in recognition of her role and sacrifice.

An example of this naming convention might be Åsta Earndaelik Andenæsik Blomik, where "Earndaelik" signifies the family's historical function or origin, and "Andenæsik" and "Blomik" reflect the surnames from the parental lines.

In contrast, the naming traditions in the Skellige Islands are more rooted in clan affiliation and the use of patronymics, reflecting a strong focus on ancestry and lineage tied to the father. Skelligers often bear names that directly connect them to their clan or paternal line, emphasizing loyalty to their familial group. For instance, Cerys an Craite, the daughter of Crach an Craite, carries a surname that signifies her belonging to the an Craite clan. Similarly, names like Olaf Stigvason and Astrid Lyttneyd Ásgeirrfinnbjornsdottir follow patronymic conventions, where "Stigvason" and "Ásgeirrfinnbjornsdottir" denote the father's name, establishing a clear lineage from one generation to the next.

Cuisine

The cuisine of Mayhen is heavily influenced by the kingdom's rugged and icy landscape, which provides limited arable land for farming. As a result, the Mayhenian diet is largely dependent on the sea, with a strong emphasis on marine life, game, and foraged foods. Preservation techniques like salting, drying, and fermenting are crucial for surviving the long, harsh winters when fresh food is scarce.

Seal Meat Soup (National Dish)

The national dish of Mayhen, a seal meat soup, reflects the kingdom's reliance on the sea for sustenance. Made from boiled seal meat, fish stock, root vegetables such as turnips and potatoes, and seasoned with salt and sea herbs, the soup is a staple in Mayhenian homes. The rich, fatty meat of seals provides much-needed calories to withstand the cold, while the addition of vegetables offers sustenance throughout the day.

Marine Mammals, Fish, and Birds

Marine mammals such as seals, walruses, and even whales play an essential role in the Mayhenian diet. Seal and whale blubber are often used to produce oil, which is not only a source of nutrition but also serves as fuel for lamps during the long, dark winters. Whale meat is typically reserved for feasts and special occasions, as hunting whales is a dangerous and revered activity.

Fish, particularly cod, herring, and salmon, are the backbone of daily meals. Cod is often dried and salted, turning into *stokfis*, a common preserved food. Herring is typically fermented or pickled, lending a strong, pungent flavor to many traditional dishes. Salmon, prized for its richness, is usually smoked or grilled over open fires.

Birds such as puffins, seagulls, and seabirds are hunted during the short summer months, their meat roasted or boiled into stews. Eggs from seabirds are also collected and preserved in saltwater brine, consumed during the winter when fresh ingredients are limited.

Foraging and Fermented Foods

Given the short growing season (even shorter than in Kovir), foraging plays an important role in Mayhenian cuisine. Edible seaweeds, wild herbs, and berries like lingonberries and cloudberries are commonly gathered in the warmer months. These are either consumed fresh or preserved through drying and fermentation.

Fermentation is a cornerstone of Mayhenian food preservation techniques. Not only are fish and marine mammals fermented, but vegetables such as cabbages, beets, and onions are also preserved using this method. These fermented vegetables provide vital nutrients during the winter months and are often eaten alongside dried or smoked fish.

Meat and Game

While marine life is the primary source of protein, land animals are also hunted. Reindeer, both wild and domesticated, are prized for their meat, hides, and antlers. Reindeer meat is typically smoked or dried to last through the winter, and blood is often used in traditional blood sausages. Other game animals include artic hare, artic fox, and ptarmigan, though these are consumed less frequently.

Dairy and Sea Salt

Mayhen does not have large-scale agriculture due to its cold climate, but small-scale dairy production exists. Reindeer milk is a valuable resource, though it is rare and reserved for those who can afford to keep reindeer herds. Dairy products like yogurt, butter, and cheese made from reindeer or artic goat milk are prized delicacies and are mostly consumed during festivals or feasts.

Sea salt is a vital seasoning in Mayhenian cuisine, as it is used to cure and preserve various foods. Salt is harvested from the seawater along the coast, a labor-intensive process that results in coarse, mineral-rich crystals.

Alcohol and Beverages

The cold climate and isolation have led to the development of a distinctive Mayhenian alcohol called *braedvin*, a strong, distilled spirit made from fermented honey, berries, or seaweed. Braedvin is consumed to warm the body during the harsh winters and is often a key part of communal celebrations and feasts. It has a sharp, biting flavor with a lingering sweetness from the honey or berries used in its fermentation.

Another popular beverage is seal oil tea, which combines hot water with a small amount of seal oil to create a nourishing, calorie-rich drink that helps the body retain warmth. Mayhenians also drink a simple fermented fish broth, which is considered both a meal and a beverage due to its rich, hearty nature.

Festive Foods

During festivals and special events, more extravagant dishes are prepared. Large roasts of reindeer or seal are common, alongside elaborate fish dishes flavored with rare imported spices like juniper berries or thyme, typically obtained through trade with Kovir and Poviss. Whale meat is served during these feasts, often grilled or cooked in stews rich with root vegetables and fermented herbs.

Desserts are simple and rare, usually made from preserved fruits such as dried cloudberries or lingonberries mixed with reindeer cream or honey. Occasionally, the Mayhenians will ferment the berries into a sweet, tangy compote or jelly, which is served as a treat during midwinter feasts.

Demographics

The vast majority of Mayhen's population is ethnically Mayhenian, with smaller populations of Tylians and Nordlings in the ports. A minority of Aen Ghele elves also reside in the country, contributing to a small half-elven population.

Besides Nordlings and Tylians, other notable minorities include slaves, as mentioned previously, primarily from Skellige and, more rarely, from Nilfgaard. These slaves are typically taken from the islands themselves or traded from the northern imperial provinces.

Physically, the Mayhenians resemble Nordlings, Tylians, and other northern ethnic groups such as the Skelligers. However, the presence of the Aen Ghele elven minority has influenced certain physical traits, such as a high prevalence of blonde hair (especially platinum blonde) and extremely pale skin, even paler than that of the Nordlings. This suggests more intermingling between the Mayhenians and Aen Ghele than contemporary Mayhenians and Aen Ghele might openly acknowledge. Other common Mayhenian traits include ginger hair (more frequent than among Nordlings), and, more rarely, light brown or dark blonde hair. Their skin is typically extremely pale, and unlike Nordlings, Mayhenians do not develop swarthy or freckled skin when exposed to southern sunlight; instead, they burn easily. Eye colors vary, with shades of blue, gray, violet, and red (a form of extremely pale blue that gives the appearance of red due to the reflection of light from blood vessels), and, more rarely, green.

Due to geographic isolation and limited resources, Mayhenians are generally shorter in stature compared to Nordlings and Skelligers, with women averaging between 1.49 and 1.55 meters, and men between 1.70 and 1.80 meters. The development of compact yet lethal weapons, such as the Mayhenian scourge, is partly attributed to these physical characteristics, enabling effective defense against human, animal, and non-human threats.

Domestic Animals

In Mayhen, the use and domestication of animals have been profoundly shaped by the region's harsh climate and rugged terrain. Due to the kingdom's isolation and limited resources, domesticated animals serve multiple purposes, often fulfilling roles that elsewhere might be divided among different species.

The reindeer holds a central role in Mayhenian society, functioning not only as cattle but also as a primary mode of transportation. Domesticated reindeer are used for their milk, meat, hides, and antlers, which are essential for survival in Mayhem's unforgiving environment. Reindeer milk is especially valued for its richness in fat, providing vital sustenance during the long, cold winters. Their hides are commonly used to make clothing, blankets, and shelter materials, given their superior insulation properties compared to other animals.

In terms of transportation, reindeer serve as both pack animals and mounts, similar to the horses of other cultures. Mayhenians have trained them to traverse the difficult, icy terrain with ease. Unlike horses, which would struggle in such cold, the reindeer are well adapted to the climate, making them a vital companion for Mayhenian travelers, hunters, and warriors. Reindeer-drawn sleds are a common sight in the kingdom's fjords, where wheeled carts would be impractical.

Language

The Mayhenians speak *Arendunge* (Lit:"The Language of the Fjords"), a language loosely related to both the Nordling language and Elder Speech. It contains several words influenced by both languages, though the precise nature of this influence remains unclear. It is believed that the influence of Elder Speech derives from the dialect spoken by the Aen Ghele, though this is uncertain.

Nordlingaen, or the *Common Tongue*, serves as a secondary language in Mayhen and is frequently heard in the kingdom's ports, particularly in the dialect of Kovir. Following Nordlingaen, Tyle Jargon is the next most commonly spoken language, followed by Skellige Jargon and Nilfgaardian. These latter two languages are less widespread and are primarily spoken by the kingdom's slave population.

In the few more remote inland areas, alongside Arendunge, the dialect of Elder Speech spoken by the Aen Ghele minority is commonly heard, with a similar number of speakers as Tyle Jargon in the ports.

Magic in Mayhen

Thanks to Nordling influence through trade, magic found its place with the establishment of the Hovi Academy in Arendye. The introduction of magic to Mayhen was gradual, reflecting the kingdom's pragmatic and survival-focused culture. Unlike the Northern Kingdoms, where mages hold significant sway over politics and society, the magical users of Mayhen, known as *tadibyas*, lack the same influence. Instead of seeking personal power, tadibya fulfill practical roles that serve the needs of their communities, often acting as advisors to local leaders, healers, and intermediaries between the natural and human worlds.

The Role of the Tadibyas

The tadibyas are unique to Mayhen and serve as equivalents to mages, priests, witches/warlocks, clerics, and druids. Despite their magical abilities, they do not command the same authority as their counterparts in other regions. Their status is lesser compared to the shamans found in the Eastern Far North, who possess great social and spiritual influence, or the politically powerful mages of the Northern Kingdoms who hold sway in courts and councils. Instead, the tadibya play a quieter but no less important role in Mayhen, grounded in the kingdom's animistic beliefs.

Their roles are diverse and reflect Mayhen's harsh and pragmatic reality. The tadibyas serve as healers, sages, and advisors, but their duties extend beyond these traditional roles. In a land where survival often depends on solving conflicts and managing scarce resources, tadibya use their magical skills to address practical problems. For example, necromancy, a forbidden practice in the Northern Kingdoms, is not only permitted but accepted in Mayhen. Tadibya are often called upon to temporarily raise the dead to solve criminal cases or provide critical information, reflecting the kingdom's matter-of-fact approach to magic. The ability to revive a person for a short time to uncover vital information is considered a necessary tool, not a moral dilemma.

The Spirituality of the Tadibyas

Similar to priests in other regions, the tadibyas guard theological knowledge, often serving as stewards of the kingdom's spiritual traditions. Their magic is deeply intertwined with their faith and emotions. Unlike mages from the Northern Kingdoms, who often approach magic from a scholarly perspective and extract power from the energy veins of the different elements, the tadibyas draw their power from belief and emotional states. They enter trance states that allow them to perform magic, often combining it with a single powerful emotion. This trance is more controlled compared to the volatile nature of witches and warlocks, who may succumb to madness or erratic behavior during their spells.

The tadibyas also share similarities with druids, as their duties often revolve around maintaining a delicate balance between human needs and the preservation of nature. In Mayhen, where the landscape is harsh and unforgiving, nature is both a provider and a threat. The tadibya act as intermediaries between these forces and the people, ensuring that both are respected and that harmony is maintained. The trance states that tadibya enter during rituals or spells are often accompanied by a fanatical intensity, resembling the fervor of clerics from

other regions.

Traditional Mages in Mayhen

Though tadibyas are the most common magical users in Mayhen, traditional mages do exist, albeit rarely. These individuals typically come from powerful families whose children have failed the entrance exams to become tadibyas but still display a talent for magic. Rather than let this talent go to waste, these families often send their children to the famed magical academies of Ban Ard (for boys) or Aretuza (for girls) in the Northern Kingdoms. The decision to send these children away is not seen as a failure but as a means of ensuring that their magical abilities can still be honed for the benefit of their families and the kingdom.

In contrast to the tadibyas, traditional mages who train at Ban Ard or Aretuza often return to Mayhen with a more structured understanding of magic. However, their role within Mayhenian society remains subdued. While they possess more "formal" training than the tadibyas, their influence is limited by the mentioned kingdom's spiritual traditions and its emphasis on practical, community-oriented magic. These mages may serve as scholars or advisors but do not wield the political power common to their peers in the Northern Kingdoms.

Fear and Suppression of Sources

The approach to Sources—individuals born with innate, often uncontrollable magical abilities—is notably different in Mayhen. In stark contrast to the Northern Kingdoms, where Sources are feared but also given the opportunity to train and learn to control their abilities, Sources in Mayhen are not given the same chance. Mayhenians believe that unchecked power, even if it is natural, is inherently corrupting. To them, Sources represent a danger not only to themselves but to the delicate balance that governs their world.

As a result, the abilities of Sources are deliberately suppressed. The Mayhenians seek to either make the Source forget their powers entirely or force them to live under such repression that their magical abilities are never realized. If a Source cannot forget or control their powers by their own means and begins to manifest dangerous or uncontrollable magical effects, they are exiled from Mayhenian society. The fear is that their presence could disrupt the natural order or bring misfortune to their respective communities, and since Sources can develop mental illnesses such as catatonia or other severe conditions, this further reinforces the Mayhenian view that their powers are a curse rather than a gift.

Monsters

Unlike other regions of the world, Mayhen experienced minimal impact from both Conjunctions of the Spheres. This, combined with the country's harsh climatic conditions, has resulted in a relative scarcity of monsters. However, the few that do inhabit the region are no less formidable; akin to the resilient populace of Mayhen, only the most tenacious and powerful monsters have endured.

In areas where the Ley Lines—invisible semi-physical conduits through which the energies of the Elemental Planes permeate the material world—are particularly pronounced, ice elementals are frequently encountered. Additionally, the region is home to various other formidable beings,

including drowners adapted to frozen waters, ice trolls, deep ice trolls, nøkkens, garms, sleipnirs, yulecats, and other similarly resilient creatures.

National Symbols

Mayhen's national symbol is a coat of arms that reflects the kingdom's environment and values. The shield is divided equally into two colors: white and blue, symbolizing the ice and the sea, respectively—two crucial elements in the kingdom's survival and identity. At the center of the shield is the alchemical symbol for salt, rendered in yellow. This symbol highlights the prosperity brought by the sea, as salt is not only a critical export but also essential for preserving food and ensuring survival during the harsh winters.

Relations with Other Cultures

Mayhen's geographic isolation and austere culture have led to strained relationships with the Northern Kingdoms and other distant countries. Their infrequent contact with the outside world is often defined by mutual distrust. While trade does occur, especially with Kovir and Poviss, as well as with Tyle and Skellige, Mayhenians are often viewed as introverted and unfriendly, a stereotype that Mayhenians themselves do little to dispel. Their reputation for brutality in both warfare and justice, as well as their association with the *lamia*, has further isolated them from more cosmopolitan northern societies such as coastal kingdoms like Redania or Cidaris.

Nevertheless, Mayhenians maintain a grudging respect for the Skelligers, with whom they share many cultural similarities, especially in their seafaring and raiding traditions. However, rivalry between the two groups remains fierce, particularly as both peoples often vie for the same maritime resources.

Notable Mayhenians

For the full list of known Mayhenians, see Category:Mayhenians.

- Åsta Earndaelik Andenæsik Blomik (Queen in the late 14th century)
- Myrkott Fallvik Artavik Iwuniwik [warrior] (mixed ancestry)
- Pakkuk Báralusik Ibn Rashid Gørrsmadik [mage] (mixed ancestry)
- Vilmos Bartvik Halldorsenik Acikstadik [merchant]

Notable Locations

Academies

- Hovi Academy

Cities

- Arendye

Settlements

- Stromford

Notes

- The Mayhen refugee crisis is taken from a campaign for The Witcher TTRPG that I developed but was never able to carry out.

Trivia

- One of the meanings of the word *Mayhem* is violent and needless disturbance or a gruesome crime of deliberately causing an injury that permanently disfigures another. The name derives via Middle English from the Anglo-French verb maheimer ("to maim") and is probably of Germanic origin.
- The fact that Mayhen is located in the Far North is partly a reference to the Norwegian black metal band Mayhem.
- Mayhen culture is a blend of several real northern cultures, including the culture of Iceland, Norway and Greenland. The culture of the Basque Country, too, has some influence (though more in language than anything else).
- Part of the lore of Mayhen is inspired in to be a dark parody of the Disney kingdom of Arendelle. Since it appears in one of the first Witcher books who had a lot of "dark parodies" to classical fairytales.

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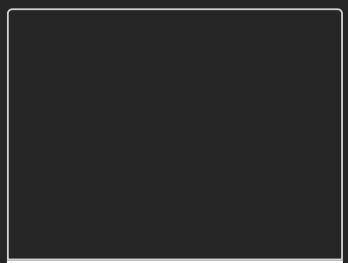

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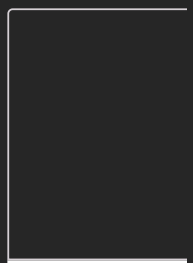

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